



X-Plain™ *Fibromyalgia*

Reference Summary

Fibromyalgia is a common condition that causes pain and fatigue in the muscles, joints, ligaments and tendons. Fibromyalgia affects about 8-10 million Americans.

Fibromyalgia has a widespread range of symptoms, and its causes are not well understood.

This reference summary explains fibromyalgia and how it is diagnosed and treated. Included are healthy living tips for managing fibromyalgia.

Fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia is a condition that causes fatigue and extensive pain in the tissues of muscles, ligaments, and tendons. The muscles affected most are in the neck, shoulders, lower back, and buttocks.

Muscles are made of 2 main parts: a fleshy part and tendons. The tendons, made of fibrous tissue, attach muscles to bones. The fleshy part causes the muscles to shorten and lengthen, or contract.

Ligaments are made of tough tissue that connects

the bones, muscles, and tendons.

Fibromyalgia, meaning “pain of the fibrous tissue and muscles”, comes from 3 words:

fibro = fibrous tissue

myo = muscles

algia = pain

Fibromyalgia is a chronic condition, which means it is ongoing. It does not get worse nor does it cause damage or inflammation to the muscles or internal organs. Fibromyalgia is not fatal.

Fibromyalgia is common between the ages of 35 and 55. About 80% of those affected are women.

Symptoms

The most common symptoms of fibromyalgia are pain and fatigue in muscles and tendons.

The muscles affected most are usually those in the shoulders, buttocks, neck, and lower back. The pain in these areas seems to originate from specific tender points called trigger points.

Fibromyalgia pain can be made worse by factors such as stress, weather changes, loud noises, and anxiety.

Up to 90% of fibromyalgia patients feel tired all the time.

Many patients experience other symptoms that can be mild or severe, and may come and go. These symptoms include

- headache and facial pain
- irritable bowel syndrome
- tingling sensation in the hands and feet
- dry eyes
- irritable bladder
- dizziness

Fibromyalgia patients may have trouble sleeping, which may add to feeling fatigued.

Headaches and jaw pain are common. Patients may have dry eyes or difficulty focusing on nearby objects.

Irritable bowel syndrome includes digestive problems such as difficulty swallowing, heartburn, gas, abdominal pain, diarrhea, and constipation.

Many patients are very sensitive to odors, bright lights,

loud noises, various foods, changes in weather, and medicines.

Patients may have feelings of numbness or tingling in parts of the body, such as the legs or feet.

Some patients have urinary problems, including frequent urination, a strong urge to urinate, or pain in the bladder. Women with fibromyalgia may have pelvic pain, painful menstrual periods, or painful sexual intercourse.

Some patients with fibromyalgia may feel dizzy.

Depression or anxiety may occur with fibromyalgia due to ongoing pain and fatigue, frustration with the condition, or a chemical imbalance in the brain.

Causes

The causes of fibromyalgia are not well understood. Doctors believe there may be several causes. Fibromyalgia may be caused by chemical changes in the brain.

Some researchers have found elevated levels of certain chemicals in the spinal fluid of fibromyalgia patients. Other chemicals, like serotonin, may be low in fibromyalgia patients.

Some researchers believe abnormal sleep is a cause of fibromyalgia rather than a symptom of it! Patients with fibromyalgia seem to lack a

phase of sleep known as non-REM, or non-rapid-eye-movement sleep, which is very important in restoring energy.

Researchers also believe that fibromyalgia might be caused by stress, infections, or injuries.

Diagnosis

Symptoms of fibromyalgia are similar to symptoms of other muscle, joint, and gland diseases. Fibromyalgia is diagnosed only after other diseases with similar symptoms are ruled out.

First, a detailed history and thorough physical examination are done.

Blood work and radiological tests, such as x-rays, may be done to make sure patients do not have a

- hormonal imbalance
- muscle disease
- nerve disease
- joint disease
- bone disease
- infection
- cancer

Electrical nerve and muscle testing known as EMG, or ElectroMyoGraphy, and NCV, or Nerve Conduction Velocity, may also be done to check the muscles and nerves.

To diagnose fibromyalgia, the doctor will press firmly on specific trigger points on the head, upper body, and cer-

tain joints. The patient may confirm which trigger points cause pain.



If the patient has had pain for more than 3 months and has abnormally tender trigger points in 10 locations, then fibromyalgia is diagnosed.

Treatment

There is no cure for fibromyalgia. Treatment consists of managing the symptoms through medication and improving general health. Alternative medicine may also be helpful for some patients.

To treat muscle pain, over-the-counter medications such as Aspirin®, Advil®, Motrin®, Tylenol®, and others may be used. These painkillers may help some patients, but long-term use may cause stomach, kidney, or liver damage.

Doctors may also prescribe pain medications such as tramadol or Ultram®.

Injections of local anesthesia and steroids at the sites of trigger points may help decrease pain.

Narcotics are usually not used as painkillers because they can cause addiction.

Other medications that have been found to be very helpful are antidepressant medications. Antidepressants correct brain and spinal cord chemical imbalances to stop pain and restore normal sleeping patterns.

Doses of antidepressants for fibromyalgia are usually much smaller than what is taken for depression.

The doctor may also prescribe muscle relaxants to be taken at bedtime.

Self-Care

Patients with fibromyalgia have chronic fatigue that leads to stress and sleep disturbances. Helping patients know how to live healthier lives is critical for reducing stress, improving sleep, increasing energy, and decreasing pain.

Healthy living and self-care consists of a program to:

- reduce stress
- sleep well
- exercise regularly
- eat healthy
- manage symptoms

Reduce Stress

Avoid situations that cause you stress.

Take time to relax. Learn relaxation techniques such as breathing exercises, guided imagery, and meditation.

Sleep Well

Go to bed early.

Avoid caffeine, especially before going to bed.

Get a comfortable mattress.

Avoid alcoholic beverages.



Exercise Regularly

Stretch when you wake up.

Low-impact aerobic exercises such as walking, swimming, and stationary bicycling can be very helpful.

Exercise regularly for at least 3 half-hour sessions per week.

The first few times you exercise, you may feel pain. With time, pain will become less severe.

Eat Healthy

Avoid caffeine, alcoholic beverages, and candy.

Take vitamins under your doctor's supervision or eat vitamin-enriched cereals.

Eat a balanced diet.

If you smoke, quit!

Manage Symptoms

Treat symptoms as they arise. For example, if you feel you have dry eyes, use eye drops. They are available over-the-counter.

Complementary Medicine

Complementary medicine, also known as alternative medicine, uses techniques different from traditional medicine to treat illnesses.

Many of these techniques are becoming more popular, especially for relieving stress and reducing pain.

Examples of complementary medicine to treat fibromyalgia include

- massage therapy
- acupressure
- acupuncture
- trigger point therapy
- chiropractic care

Some complementary medicine techniques have controversial evidence of effectiveness, but many patients feel that they make a difference.

Many patients with fibromyalgia use complementary medicine to relieve pain and reduce stress.

Massage Therapy

Massage involves the practitioner moving muscles and underlying tissues mostly with his or her hands. There are various types of mas-

sage, including Swedish, deep connective tissue, and Shiatsu massage.

The main goals of massage therapy are to

- increase blood circulation
- loosen sore muscles
- remove toxins from muscles
- align muscles and joints that are misaligned
- increase the flow of nutrients

Massage helps to relieve stress and anxiety. You should avoid it if you have open sores, or circulatory problems such as blood clots.



Acupressure

In acupressure, the practitioner applies pressure with his or her fingers at certain points in the body.

The aim of acupressure is to restore flow of energy in invisible life force pathways under the skin. Acupressure is based on the belief that illness is caused when the flow of energy through these pathways is disrupted.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture is like acupressure and based on the same beliefs. However, instead of applying pressure, the acupuncture practitioner inserts very small needles at certain points of the body to restore the flow of energy.

Trigger Point Therapy

In trigger point therapy, a therapist applies sustained pressure for few minutes at a time, at specific trigger points. Trigger points are points in the body where muscle pain begins.

Chiropractic Care

The goal of chiropractic care is to realign the vertebrae of the spine. A chiropractor stretches vertebrae to relieve pressure from nerves and to allow the body to heal itself. It is based on the belief that certain illnesses are caused by misaligned vertebrae.

Summary

Fibromyalgia is a common condition that causes pain and fatigue in the muscles, joints, ligaments and tendons.

There is no cure for fibromyalgia. Treatment consists of managing the symptoms with medication and improving general health through self-care. Complementary Medicine may also be helpful for some patients.

Since fibromyalgia has no visible symptoms, it is often misunderstood. Helping pa-

tients and their friends understand the condition makes coping easier.

Stress management techniques, exercises, and medications help fibromyalgia patients cope with pain and get their lives back!